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ABSTRACT

Two types of testing can be used to enhance the physical education experiences of handicapped learners. Content referenced tests insure that curricula accurately reflect the students' present level of functioning and appropriate goals. Relevant needs should be determined, taking into account such factors as future recreational opportunities, available facilities, and sources of information. Based on this knowledge, appropriate skills are selected for the handicapped learners. A logical instructional sequence is developed, and the students' present level of performance is determined. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is drawn up, defining major skills as long range goals, and component steps of the skills as enabling objectives. With IEP's for each handicapped student, the entire physical education curriculum can be pieced together. Periodic testing determines progress, so that the curriculum can evolve as the learners' needs change. Standardized testing is a normative test method designed to reflect the ranking of one individual to another, or to a group. If, through standardized testing, a handicapped learner is found to differ significantly from his peers, content referenced testing can be used to design an appropriate curriculum. (FG)

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Content Referenced and Standardized Testing

by

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss possible contributions of content referenced test results and standardized test results to functional curriculum construction. Specifically, I will propose ways information from each type of testing can be used to improve the likelihood that physical education experiences will enhance handicapped learners' participation in community-based recreational opportunities.

Content referenced testing is a process used to insure that curricula accurately reflect present level of functioning and appropriate goals and objectives for each learner. Although the term "content referenced testing" may be new to some, the practice has been widely used in educational circles for decades.

In education it is a common practice to measure mastery of material included in our curriculum by testing students' acquisition of information taught to them. To measure acquisition of knowledge we review the information to be taught, or in retrospect review material already taught, and then select important facts or concepts on which to test students. Once we have tested learners we know whether they have mastered basic skills and knowledges that can be built upon or whether concepts have been missed and need to be retaught. Just as a test that accurately measures information taught to the students is considered a truthful, or valid, measure of knowledge, a test that is built upon information that students will need in later life should contribute to a valid curriculum.

Because of the importance of handicapped individuals learning to participate in community life, a valid curriculum for these learners would be one

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that included actual skills and knowledges needed to actively function in community-based settings. The greater the relationship between the curriculum and functional skills needed in the community, the more valid the curriculum. The professional charged with preparing a handicapped individual to make a smooth transition from dependent functioning to independent participation in a community must possess the skill to build curricula that contribute to self sufficiency in the community. The effective teacher designs tests to reflect material taught in a unit; the knowledgeable professional designs curricula to include activities relevant to the learner's long-term welfare. Content referenced testing is a powerful tool for making curricula functional.

Following, I will discuss how content referenced testing can be used to design physical education curricula with direct application to later life recreational participation. The seven points I will cover are: 1) how to determine relevant skills to include in the curriculum, 2) considerations when selecting appropriate activities, 3) the importance of arranging these skills into a logical developmental sequence, 4) determining present levels of functioning, 5) using predetermined skills to develop the I.E.P., 6) developing curricula to meet the unique needs of the learner, and 7) monitoring student progress.

1. To begin with, one needs to determine which recreational skills will be needed to participate in community-based recreation programs. This determination could be accomplished by directly surveying a target community's recreational facilities and program. An alternative approach would be to survey different areas of the state where handicapped populations are usually placed. Rural areas, small towns and large cities differ significantly in formal and informal recreational opportunities available to their citizens. Factors to be taken into account when surveying recreational opportunities could be as limited

as actual activities available such as bowling, roller skating, jogging and/or dancing. Tangential considerations could be as broad as the need to know how to contact agencies to inquire about recreational activities, the need to understand how to use public transportation to get to recreational activities,

and/or procedures to use to enroll in community recreation programs.

2. Once needed skills and knowledges have been determined, a decision about which of these would be most appropriate and realistic for the handicapped individuals must be made. Considerations should include interests of the handicapped, number of people to be placed in a given area, and physical limitations. Obviously any person will be more strongly motivated to participate in an activity if interested. Without a doubt, individual interests may be biased if one's knowledge of available posibilities is limited. Hence, it is important that the handicapped person understand the possibilities of selection before making a decision. If only one person is to be placed in a community, the selection of individual recreational skills such as jogging or roller skating might be most appropriate. However, it goes without saying, the more interaction between normals and handicapped that can be promoted, the better. In cases where groups of handicapped people will be placed in a community, opportunities for them to interact as a group as well as with normals should be explored. Lastly, a consideration that should not be overlooked when determining appropriate skills to be learned are physical or sensory limitations of the handicapped persons. Those individuals with orthopedic, sensory or cardiovascular limitations will require different activities from the more physically able. Accessibility and availability of assistive devices would be important considerations in these cases.

3. Arranging the decided upon skills to be learned into a logical developmental sequence will enhance the handicapped student's chance to attain a mastery level of performance. Once the major skills to be learned are determined, these skills should be arranged in order of difficulty with the more basic being listed first. Major skills should then be task analyzed to determine component parts that contribute to success of the major skill. For example, if bowling is the skill to be learned, prerequisite or component parts of delivering the ball would be selecting shoes and a properly fitted ball, addressing the pins, aiming, making the approach, and follow through. Each of these components would need to be included in the list of skills to be learned.

4. Determining present level of performance and/or knowledge of the skills to be learned is the next logical step. By actually taking the handicapped learner through the entire process of the skill it is possible to discover which component parts the learner knows and can handle, and which parts or what series of steps will need to be taught.

5. Once we have determined which skills and components are lacking, we can develop the Individual Educational Plan. Major skills to be learned would be listed under long range goals; component parts that constitute necessary steps to learning the major skills would become our enabling objectives. Both the long range goals and the enabling objectives should be stated in behavioral terms with specified acceptable mastery criteria. Appropriate activities to facilitate reaching each goal should be included in the I.E.P.

6. Having developed the Individual Educational Plans for each of our learners, the entire physical education curriculum can be pieced together. Appropriate teaching units will be determined on the basis of each of our learner's predetermined needs.

Because our curriculum has been built from test information on each student, the content of our curriculum can be referenced directly to test results of students' abilities.

7. After instruction directly related to the students' needs has been initiated, periodic testing to determine progress toward long range goals and enabling objectives should be carried out. The curriculum should be constantly modified to reflect the acquired skill level of the learners. New activities are selected on the basis of demonstrated competency on each learner's part. Hence, the physical education curriculum evolves as the needs of the learners change.

The content referenced testing approach is intended to promote a dynamic, ever-changing curriculum that ~~actively~~ accurately reflects present level of functioning and functional goals and objectives for each handicapped learner. However, it does not provide information about how one learner is performing compared to other learners. For that type of information we must turn to tests developed specifically for comparative purposes. Standardized tests were designed to meet this need.

Standardized testing provides normative information that enables the educator to compare handicapped populations to normal populations or other handicapped groups. These comparative results tell us where a learner is performing in relation to a group. The ranking or percentile figure is not intended to provide descriptive information about what a student knows or does not know. It is intended to help us compare one child's functioning to a set group standard of performance. Because of the group orientation of comparative tests, instructional strategies selected on the basis of their results focus on group needs. Physical education curricula constructed from standardized test results often ignore or, at best, minimally consider unique needs of

learners.

Items selected for inclusion in standardized tests are ability traits believed to transfer to many skills. The validity of the items in some cases rests upon historical agreement; in other instances firmer data are available. In many cases the relationship of items found on standardized tests to functional skill levels of handicapped learners is blurred. That is, the ability traits tests may or may not be related to actual recreational skills handicapped learners need to achieve self-sufficiency in a community-based recreation program. It follows that physical education curricula based on standardized test results may or may not include functional skills needed to participate in recreational settings. This is not to say that standardized test results are useless, rather, because of the vague relationship between ability traits tested by standardized tests and functional skills included in I.E.P.'s, referencing the handicapped learners' curriculum directly to test results becomes very difficult. When we attempt to defend the legitimacy of activities selected on the basis of standardized tests, professionals not familiar with physical education terms often must accept our curriculum content on faith. Because of the accountability requirements built into education programs for the handicapped, "faith" arguments are unacceptable to most administrators. The more visable our curricular content in relation to long-range goals and enabling objectives, the more acceptable our physical education programs become.

I do believe standardized testing has a place in physical education. Public Law 94-142 requires that we determine whether or not our handicapped students can benefit from normal education services. The widely accepted practice of using standardized tests for screening purposes to determine whether or not an individual differs significantly from others of the same sex and age is a legitimate technique for deciding whether special services are needed. Handicapped individuals who do not differ significantly from normals may not

require a specially designed program to promote general development. That is, they may possess the prerequisite skills and knowledges to acquire functional recreation skills in a well designed regular physical education curriculum. If, however, through the uses of standardized testing a handicapped learner is found to differ significantly from his normal peers, content referenced testing should then be used to assist in designing a curriculum for the purpose of promoting functional skill development.

I am convinced educational administrators will accept and promote physical education for handicapped students if we can demonstrate the importance of our discipline to disabled individuals' welfare and function. Appropriate use of both standardized and content referenced tests can strengthen our curricula and lead to broader acceptance by educational systems.